

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

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## WHICH WAY IS NORTH?

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In order to build, or un-build, one always needs to know that they are in the correct location. Usually, this is done by relying on a point on the compass called north. This seems to make sense, as the compass has been around since the 13th century. Knowing which way is north, the other directions follow. Most of the time, this method works great. But, what if the building or site is a square or rectangle, with one corner pointing north? Which of 2 sides do you call the north side?

The Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan is such a place. It is not the only one, as many buildings in Old Town San Diego were built with this alignment. The reason however is not based on north, it is based on south.

South is the direction of maximum sun exposure in San Diego. To take advantage of this, you would want 2 long exterior walls to have this exposure. In what white-landers (people who live where it

snows) call winter, sun warming 2 long sides is passive solar heating at its best. Opening the window shutters in the daytime allows warm air to move inside. Heat or cold can not move through the almost three foot thick walls in one, or even two nights.

And, there is the wind. In “winter”, the wind coming off the ocean can be cool. Capturing that in the *jardin* (courtyard) would cool down the area most used for daytime activities. Having the yard protected from that direction keeps the area as comfortable as possible. By closing the *zaguán* or entrance hall doors, wind is reduced to a minimum.

In warmer months, the building acts in reverse. This alignment gives the *jardin*, morning sun while it is coolest, and the most shade in the afternoon, when it is warmer. By opening the windows and doors of the *zaguán*, large volumes of air are forced through small openings. Air loses temperature as it increases in velocity. The air not only gets cooler, but also gets dryer, as the humidity it carries is partly condensed. This courtyard design, developed in Mediterranean areas comes to the U.S. via Spain.

Understanding the reasoning and history of the alignment gives us insight to the ingenuity of the builders but, does not help us with our dilemma. Which side should we call north? If the architects call one side north, and the archaeologists call the other side north, confusion will certainly ensue. So, to make it as clear as possible, in general conversation, we will name the sides by the corresponding street names, or areas adjacent: The Mason Street side, the Calhoun Street side (or Estudillo side), the Juan Street side, and Seeley side (the direction of the stable). While this may not be normal protocol, everyone will be much clearer on location.

